

**Michigan Every Day**  
**By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberely**  
Sept. 23, 1967  
Lake Michigan fishing frenzy tragedy

By the mid-1960s, tinkering with the Great Lakes ecosystem by humans had caused some serious problems. The opening of the Erie Canal and the Welland Canal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought the invasive sea lamprey into the Great Lakes. These monster-like creatures latch onto and suck the life out of native species such as lake trout and whitefish. It took decades for the sea lamprey to make its way into the lakes and establish themselves. But without natural predators, they flourished. By the numbers of lake trout and whitefish dwindled while alewives flourished. The alewife population exploded to the point that they were washing up and rotting on beaches by the millions, the stench turning away would-be beach goers. Michigan wildlife officials responded in two ways – they stepped up control measures for the sea lamprey and they looked for a fish species that would eat alewives. They decided Pacific salmon would be the ideal predator for the small fish that were stinking up the beaches while offering a unique sports fishing opportunity. It turned out that the scheme worked. The salmon were planted and survived. By the fall of 1967, Lake Michigan was bursting with the first class of planted Coho salmon. Suddenly, anyone with a boat headed out to the big lake to fish for an easy dinner.

excited were the fishermen than many failed to heed a small craft advisory on the morning of Sept. 23, 1967. The storm brought high winds that produced eight-foot waves. The small vessels used by many fishermen were no match for the turbulent lake waters, which swamped and overturned many boats. As a result, seven people drowned.